

Newsletter



An Fóram Uisce – looking after Ireland’s water resources

Issue 08 / Summer 2022



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River Basin Management Plan

On 7th April the Water Forum presented their recommendations on the River Basin Management Plan to the Joint Oireachtas Committee.

The Water Forum Chair, Dr Matt Crowe; SEO Donal Purcell and Research Lead Dr Triona McGrath attended the Joint Oireachtas Committee for a discussion on the 3rd River Basin Management Plan (RBMP).

The Committee facilitated a wide-ranging exploration of the issues with expert contributions from the Water Forum, Teagasc, An Taisce and the Sustainable Water Network, SWAN. The Water

Framework Directive (WFD) requires that ‘good ecological status’ is achieved in all waterbodies by 2027. Currently, approximately 50% of Ireland’s lakes, rivers and estuaries are at good status.

Of Ireland’s 4842 waterbodies, 1603 need improvement measures; 1983 are at good status and need protection measures so they do not deteriorate and 1256 are in review meaning they need further assessments to determine



the measures that are required to protect or improve them.

Agriculture is the most significant pressure impacting on approximately 1000 waterbodies, reflecting an increasing trend since the last cycle. Waterbody modifications (drainage, channel modification, habitat change) are the second most significant pressure affecting 442 waterbodies, forestry impacts 233 waterbodies and urban wastewater is the most significant pressure in 208 waterbodies.

In the Chair's introductory statement, he welcomed the committee's interest in the 3rd cycle of the RBMP. He noted the Water Forum's position represents an agreed position from all of the members including the agricultural sector, business representatives, environmental NGOs, community, angling, recreation, and education sectors.

The Forum's submission is informed by extensive dialogue and engagement with the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage & other agencies to bring a range of interests and different perspectives together

– a core strength of the Forum. The Forum in its submission has made recommendations in four key areas:

- An outcomes-based approach
- Governance
- Public Participation
- Pressures

An outcomes-based approach

The members of the Forum are of the view that it is essential that an outcomes-based approach is taken with targeted measures identified and implemented for every water body in Ireland. Under the WFD, each water body has an associated objective to achieve by 2027, therefore, details should be provided on targeted measures to either protect water bodies from deterioration, or to restore water bodies to at least good status. Timelines for achieving these objectives, along with interim milestones will also be essential to ensure progress of the third cycle can be tracked. This outcomes-based approach would ensure effective and efficient planning and implementation of the plan, along with transparent monitoring of progress by the Department, agencies and key

stakeholders. This approach will target and strengthen efforts to reduce each of the pressures outlined in the RBMP and will keep all implementation bodies focussed on the need to achieve positive outcomes for water quality.

Governance

In relation to governance the Forum recommends that there should be a full-time RBMP secretariat to ensure successful implementation and monitoring of the Plan and to support the required engagement and cooperation between the different tiers of governance. Managed engagement between government departments could ensure policy coherence and alignment with national and EU policies. The Forum calls for increased transparency and accountability of the RBMP implementation bodies and recommends for structured engagement between all tiers. The Forum recommends an urgent commitment to resource the RBMP and to develop a comprehensive financing strategy to support the implementation of measures to deliver on ambitious Water, Climate and Biodiversity objectives.

Public Participation

The overall level of meaningful public and stakeholder engagement in the implementation of the WFD needs to radically improve. A new national approach to public participation needs to be set-up to develop stakeholder visions & action plans in the 46 catchment areas. The Forum recommends that a phased approach should be taken in a number of pilot catchments to test approaches to improve public engagement. These pilots should take place very early in the 3rd cycle so that more effective and meaningful public engagement processes are in place for the remainder of the 3rd cycle. A framework will have to be developed to enable Local Authorities and agencies to work together to support public participation for water, biodiversity and climate. There needs to be consistent, ongoing, and informed discussion at local level that facilitates the co-creation of solutions and action by agencies, communities and individuals to protect our natural resources.

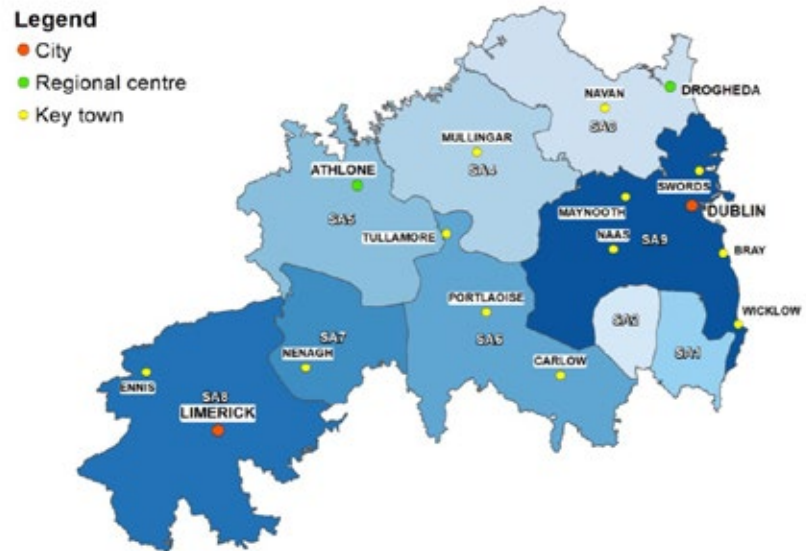
Pressures

The Forum has made over 80 recommendations for pressures impacting on waterbodies. The Forum emphasises the need for alignment of policies and strategies from different sectors with the objectives of WFD. Furthermore, the Forum recommends increased accountability of Government departments and state bodies for reducing their relevant pressures and highlights the need for WFD assessments for many sectoral activities impacting the aquatic environment. Training in the WFD and catchment management is essential for staff within Government departments, state bodies and agencies for better alignment with the WFD 'protect' or 'restore' objectives. Emphasis will also need to be placed on knowledge exchange and awareness to support ownership of actions to protect water, climate, and nature.

The RBMP submission is available [here](#).

Policy submissions

Submission to Irish Water's public consultation on the draft Regional Water Resources Plan for the Eastern and Midlands Region.



Map of water supply areas taken from Irish Water's draft Regional Water Resources Plan for the Eastern and Midlands Region.

As part of its delivery of the National Water Resources Plan, Irish Water has presented its first Regional Water Resources Plan, for the Eastern and Midlands Region, for public consultation. There are 201 Water Treatment Plants (WTPs) in the Eastern and Midlands Region, which collectively serve 2.48 million people or 60% of the population of Ireland, via approximately 19,000 kilometres of distribution network. The size of these WTPs varies, with the largest two in the region producing on average 49% of the water supplied and the remaining producing on average about 51% of the total supply. The WTPs feed water into supply areas known as Water Resources Zones (WRZs). Each WRZ is an independent water supply system serving a region, city, town or village and is governed by topography or the extent of the water distribution network in an area. Within a WRZ most customers receive the same Level of Service (LoS), measured as a probability of interruption to services (for example one interruption to the supply in 50

years). The draft plan presents the key issues that impact the quality, sustainability and reliability of existing water supplies throughout the region and presents Irish Water's proposed preferred options to provide the infrastructure development required to address the identified need.

In its submission to Irish Water, the Water Forum recognised the significance of the draft plan for both the environmental and socio-economic development in Ireland over the coming decades.

The Eastern and Midlands region is of particular importance, supplying over 50% of the country's national supply (887 million litres/day to 2.48 million people and 76,000 businesses), it is the region with the lowest levels of rainfall along with the greatest population density. Furthermore, population growth, climate change, aging infrastructure and spatial-economic changes are increasingly stressing the water resources, and Irish Water is

challenged to reverse the results of previous approaches (e.g. fragility of water supply to the Greater Dublin Area) and support increasing needs with limited resources, while facing a number of data gaps.

The Forum’s submission aimed to address the fragility of water supply in the Greater Dublin Region by supporting urgent action to increase water supply and resilience throughout the Eastern and Midlands Region. Following a technical review of the plan and detailed discussions with the Forum members the decision was made to concentrate on a range of high-level issues pertinent to the Eastern and Midlands Region that reflected an agreed position of all of the members.

In the National Water Resources Plan (NWRP), Irish Water proposed three key pillars, stating “together these pillars will enable Irish Water to optimise our capital and operational solutions to achieve the best outcomes and react to emerging issues”. These three key pillars of Lose Less (reducing leakage), Use Less (promoting and supporting water conservation) and Supply Smarter (developing the right combination of infrastructure that provides a sustainable, connected, resilient, long term water supply where it’s needed without negatively impacting the environment)

and each have a role to play in achieving sustainability and resilience in water supply across the Eastern and Midlands region. The Forum is of the view that the current RWRP requires more emphasis across all three pillars and have therefore presented recommendations in the context of these. The Forum is particularly concerned about the relative lack of consideration of the Use Less Pillar in the draft Plan. Approaching these pillars in a more holistic way, could result in simultaneous improvements at many levels.

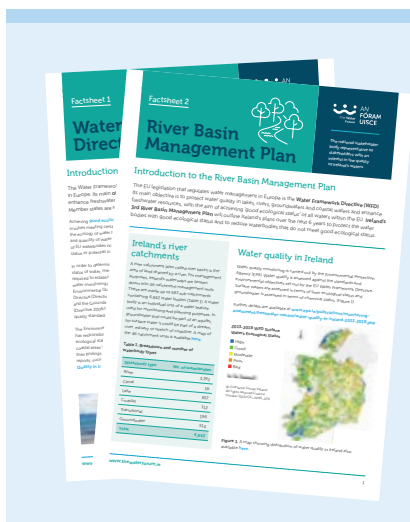
The Forum recommends that **demand management** via water conservation solutions, should be emphasised in the final Plan. Research commissioned by the Water Forum identified the need for enhanced education to support bottom-up understanding of the water supply processes. The delivery of an awareness campaign to highlight water scarcity in Ireland would facilitate a better understanding. The demand management recommendations included piloting smart metering as a water conservation measure in water supply zones with high supply vulnerabilities.

Under the **Lose Less pillar**, the Forum recommended greater urgency on the National Leakage Reduction Programme particularly in areas with the greatest supply deficits.

In the **supply smarter pillar**, the Forum recommended that IW schedule time-bound, outcomes-based actions to address data gaps to accurately access hydrological balances and supply-demand estimates in water supply zones. Knowledge of the broader environmental capacity (catchment-based assessments), in conjunction with the infrastructure capacity, is key achieving the necessary methodological updates regarding supply (water availability) and demand estimates. Furthermore, cumulative impacts of abstractions on a catchment should also be considered.

While a number of further recommendations were included in the submission, the Forum would like IW to add actions to the Regional Plan to highlight how they will *increase transparency in their data*, such as using monitoring and knowledge-based tools to make open-source information available for water supply services so that the public and stakeholders can make informed decisions on their own water use behaviours and considered contributions to public consultation processes.

The submission is available at www.thewaterforum.ie



Education and awareness

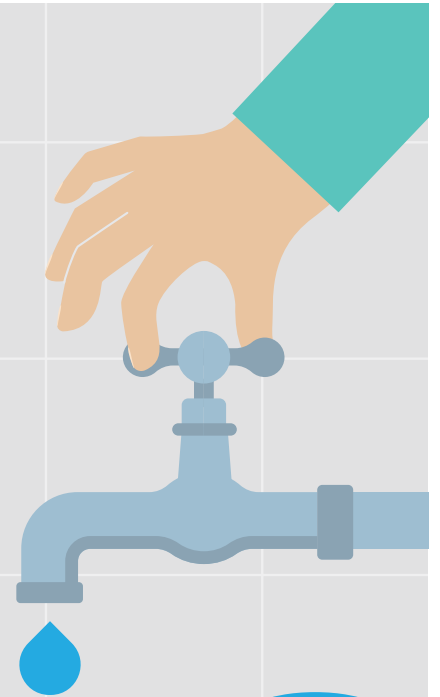
Factsheets

The Forum is preparing a series of introductory Factsheets to the Water Framework Directive, an Introduction to the River Basin Management Plan and more are forthcoming in the coming months. Please circulate these to your networks.

The Introduction to the River Basin Management Plan Factsheet is available [here](#)

Water is worth saving!

Water use in our home accounts for nearly **20% of the energy we use!** Using less water will save money and reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. Save water and energy with these simple tips.



In the Bathroom

Showers and baths use 30% of the water used in our homes. Spending **one minute less** in each shower can save 2,600 litres of water a year and reduce your CO₂ footprint by 27kg



Turning off the tap when shaving or brushing your teeth saves **3,700 litres** per year per person



Leaky taps and loos can waste up to 400 litres of water a day, get them fixed as soon as possible



In the Kitchen

Only fill the kettle **with the water you need**. If everyone drinks 4 cups a day, that's 20 million cups of tea a day!



A full dishwasher or washing machine will save energy and water use. **Washing at 30 degrees** rather than 40 degrees reduces energy consumption by 57%



Saving Water Outside

A hosepipe can fill 5 bath tubs in 30 minutes. Use a **bucket and sponge** to wash the car to save water



For watering plants, use a **watering can** in the morning or late in the evening so that plants get the most benefits as less water evaporates



Get a water butt and **save rainwater** as it contains nitrogen that helps plants to thrive. A small roof can collect 45,000 litres of water a year!



Living better – using less

Research

The Water Forum’s recently commissioned research on ‘An assessment of Policy Coherence and Conflicts for Water and Environmental Management’ and a Research Report and Policy Brief prepared by Nelly Montblanc has been submitted to the Water Forum.

Despite the existence of environmental and water management policies for over 50 years, the condition of our natural world continues to decline. There is a clear discrepancy between policy ambitions and results and this research posits that these are owing to a combination of high-level causes including: cognitive biases, social norms, geopolitics, combined with specific policy challenges.

The policy challenges include:

- insufficient ‘stringency’ that is setting easy targets;
- a lack of implementation such as not enforcing measures to achieve the targets; and
- piecemeal development of policy and implementation.

Water and environmental management are wicked-problems in that they are characterised by complexity, uncertainty and divergence (differing perspectives and understandings of the problems, issues and solutions).

Policy coherence is more of an attitude than a rigorous process and it requires a new lens that ensures linkages between policy domains and issues to increase understanding and awareness, costs and benefits. New policy instruments need to consider those already in existence and the ‘on the ground’ conditions. Conflicting objectives and perspectives, traditionally hidden or left unsolved, need to be considered openly and addressed.

The report and policy brief identified a number of conditions that are required to provide for better policy alignment. Key to these is a focus on knowledge development; particularly strengthening dialogue between science and policy through action research projects. Cooperation across institutional boundaries with greater transparency in policy development where agencies and

“Despite the existence of environmental and water management policies for over 50 years, the condition of our natural world continues to decline”.

departments work together to identify potential interfaces between relevant environmental and sectoral policies and to identify and agree trade-offs in a transparent way.

Moving forward, to achieve the real transformative change required for us to live within planetary boundaries, a paradigm shift would need to be fostered. This will require among other things, new narratives, such as ‘living better with less impact’. Stakeholders could also be involved to build-up collective preferences through deliberative processes.

The research report is available [here](#). The policy brief is available [here](#).



Recent Water Forum plenary meetings are hybrid with some members attending online but policy options are discussed and collective responses that are agreeable to all are pursued.